



AGENCY OVERVIEW

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Washington State Human Rights Commission (WSHRC) is to eliminate and prevent discrimination through the fair application of the law, the efficient use of resources, and the establishment of productive partnerships in the community.

WSHRC's focus is on the prompt, efficient, and neutral enforcement of the law. All staff share a commitment to these core principles:

- Fairness and Objectivity
- Responsiveness and Professionalism
- Respect for Diversity in Cultures, Values, and Behavior
- Excellence and Innovation
- Service in the Public Interest

AUTHORITY STATEMENT

The WSHRC is a neutral enforcement agency. We do not represent the complainant or the respondent. We represent the law. Under Chapter 49.60 RCW, the Commission investigates individual complaints of discrimination in the following areas:

	Employment	Real Estate	Public Accommodation	Credit	Insurance
Race - Color	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Creed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
National Origin	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Disability (HIV: RCW 49.60.172, 174)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Use of Dog Guide or Service Animal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sex	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marital Status	✓	✓		✓	✓
Age	✓				
Whistleblower Retaliation	✓				
Affirmative Action (RCW 49.74)	✓				
Families with Children		✓			

In addition, **RCW 49.60.110** authorizes the commission to formulate policies to effectuate the purposes of the chapter and may make recommendations to agencies and officers of the state or local subdivisions of government in aid of such policies and purposes.

RCW 49.60.120 authorizes WSHRC to:

- ✓ Adopt suitable rules and regulations to eliminate and prevent discrimination,
- ✓ Issue publications and findings that promote good will and advance the agency's mission,
- ✓ Conduct and publish technical studies that further the agency's mission, and
- ✓ Foster good community relations through seminars, training, and educational programs.

COMMISSIONERS

The Governor appoints the five Human Rights Commissioners to staggered five-year terms. They provide the policy framework for the agency and delegate the day-to-day activities to the Executive Director, whom they appoint. The Commissioners meet monthly at locations around the state.

OPERATIONS: GETTING THE JOB DONE

The Commission has one basic function -- to eliminate and prevent discrimination. The agency carries out its mission through the efforts Investigators and Specialists. They perform a diverse range of duties:

- Conducting intake and investigation of discrimination complaints,
- Attempting early mediation and resolution,
- Ensuring compliance with the law, and
- Educating and training the community on the Law Against Discrimination.

Case Processing

WSHRC's highest priority is the prompt, efficient, and thorough investigation of individual discrimination complaints. When a complaint is filed the Commission acts as a neutral fact-finder. The Commission is not an advocate for either side. Our role under the law is to gather facts about the situation and then determine whether there is cause to believe that discrimination occurred.

The first step is for a person to contact WSHRC when they believe they have been discriminated against. An Intake Officer conducts an initial interview, either by phone or in person. The Intake Officer explains the law and investigation process and determines whether the allegations fall within the agency's jurisdiction. If the complaint does not fall within agency's jurisdiction the complainant is referred to an appropriate federal or local agency. Once jurisdiction is established the Intake Officer asks for information to assess whether there is adequate reason to file a formal complaint. If there is, the Intake Officer send the complainant a complaint questionnaire and drafts a formal complaint for the Complainant's review and approval.

The intake process is crucial -- WSHRC typically receives over 20,000 intake calls per year, of which 1,200 to 1,500 become formal complaints.

After a person files a complaint, WSHRC assigns it to an Investigator. The investigator will investigate the complaint by gathering evidence, interviewing witnesses and conducting site visits. The investigator determines whether or not the facts of the complaint support reasonable cause to believe discrimination occurred. Throughout the process Commission staff watch for opportunities to assist the parties to resolve their dispute, via mediation or negotiation of a mutually satisfactory settlement.

Complaints can reach several outcomes:

- No Reasonable Cause - the facts of the case are not sufficient to substantiate the allegations of discrimination
- Pre-Finding Settlement - both parties have agreed to settle the case prior to the completion of the investigation
- No Jurisdiction - WSHRC lacks the authority to investigate the complaint
- Withdrawal - the Complainant asks the agency to stop action on the complaint
- Reasonable Cause - there is cause to believe that discrimination has occurred.

If the Commission finds "Reasonable Cause," WSHRC attempts to conciliate the matter. Staff prepares a formal settlement agreement that identifies steps necessary to eliminate and prevent the unfair practice(s). However, if conciliation is unsuccessful, WSHRC may turn the matter over to the Attorney General for litigation before an Administrative Law Judge.

Community Outreach and Training

A proactive education and training program is a powerful tool in eliminating and preventing discrimination. It is particularly important that businesses and property owners/managers clearly understand their rights and responsibilities under the law.

As part of the Commission's outreach efforts, the Commissioners meet at different locations throughout the state on a monthly basis. This enables the Commissioners and staff to hear from diverse community members while providing support and assistance whenever possible. WSHRC provides targeted outreach to such areas as the Tri-Cities, Mount Vernon/Skagit County, and Vancouver/Clark County. In addition, Commission staff has worked with Human rights groups in Kitsap, Lewis, Thurston, and Spokane counties, among others, in a coordinated effort to prevent and eliminate discrimination. Agency staff are regular presenters at training workshops and speaking engagements that provide information on agency procedures and each person's rights and responsibilities under the law.